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SENSITIVE

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SUBJECT: JORDAN EXERCISED OVER RED-DEAD INACTION

1. (SBU) SUMMARY. Jordanian Minister of Planning Awadallah vented his extreme frustration to the Ambassador over continuing squabbling and inaction on the Red-Dead Feasibility Study Terms of Reference. Awadallah blamed both the Israelis and Palestinians for the lack of movement on the project and his inability to convince the WEF organizers to host a Red-Dead panel session in Davos in which he hopes U/S Larson will participate. Awadallah has asked for U.S. intervention with Abu Alaa to bring the Palestinians along. Barring resolution in time for Davos, Awadallah intends to showcase it again at the WEF Dead Sea forum later this spring. Continuing wrangling over Palestinian participation and legal rights threatens to stall the project indefinitely, as international donors and the World Bank push for a trilateral solution. END SUMMARY.

2. (SBU) In a January 14 meeting on an unrelated topic with Jordanian Minister of Planning Bassem Awadallah, the Ambassador also heard a litany of complaints about the lack of progress on the Red Sea-Dead Sea Terms of Reference (TOR) for the feasibility study. Awadallah's frustration was primarily directed at the Palestinians, but his Israeli partners did not escape criticism.

3. (SBU) According to Awadallah, following a number of rounds of discussions and revisions of the draft TOR in December, in which language offensive to the Israelis on political and legal grounds was renegotiated, both the Israelis and Jordanians agreed that it was possible to move forward. The lead Jordanian technical negotiator, Zafer Alem, Secretary General of the Jordan Valley Authority, proposed specific language for a letter to be sent from Israeli Minister of National Infrastructure Joseph Paritzky to Jordanian Minister of Water and Irrigation, Hazim Al-Naser.

4. (SBU) What transpired next, and which frustrated senior Jordanian officials, was a letter from Paritzky's advisor, Erez Yemini, to Alem, in which the Israelis characterized the December meetings as reflective of the commitment to promote and execute the feasibility study for the Red-Dead "by both parties--Jordan and Israel." The Jordanians took exception to the last phrase and argued that it raises, in writing yet again, one of the biggest hurdles for movement on the project--the stated exclusion of the Palestinians. (COMMENT: Separately, to the Palestinians, the Jordanians have been claiming to watch out for their interests by making them "beneficiaries" of the project, but privately we continue to hear that Jordan wants this to move ahead at all costs, garnering support from the international donor community by meeting its demands to remove any language that hints the Palestinians are not an integral part of the larger project. End Comment.)

5. (SBU) After the Jordanians complained to the Israelis about the sole identification of the two parties and that the letter was not from the minister himself, Paritzky sent an amended letter, removing the disputed reference to only Israel and Jordan. The letter clearly stated Israel's acceptance of the TOR; but they added another paragraph with a similar reference to Jordan and Israel being the only parties to discuss the draft TOR with the World Bank, effectively cutting the Palestinians out of the process and undermining the apparent revisions to the TOR.

6. (SBU) On the Palestinian front, the Jordanians also have not been as successful in gaining their unqualified support for the Red-Dead TOR. According to Awadallah, he convinced the Jordanian Prime Minister to call Palestinian PM Abu Alaa five times to seek approval for the revised TOR--all to no avail. Abu Alaa, in theory, supported the revisions, and was to have instructed Palestinian Planning Minister Nabil Kassis to move forward. The Jordanians were told by Abu Alaa that their acceptance letter would be in Amman in 24 hours. It did not come. Kassis, who has been in Amman recently, claims he doesn't have the authority to agree to such a TOR; only Abu Alaa can authorize it. Attempts by Awadallah and Al-Naser to reach Kassis have been met by silence.

7. (SBU) In a plea for U.S. support, Awadallah implored the Ambassador to call CG Jerusalem to have him weigh in with Abu

Alaa, in addition to having the Ambassador contact A/S Burns to push Palestinian acceptance. Although Awadallah is still seeking to salvage a Red-Dead session for the upcoming Davos WEF, the Ambassador told him frankly that we could do little at this late stage. (Awadallah said he needed action that night within six hours.)

18. (SBU) COMMENT: The apparent breakdown in communication between the Israelis and Jordanians on this highly sensitive point of Palestinian participation and rights threatens to continue to stall the implementation of the feasibility study. In fact, however, the Jordanian efforts with the Palestinians are more serious. Palestinian reluctance to jeopardize their negotiating position on future water rights is making them a difficult potential partner. Similarly, the Israelis are hesitant to acknowledge certain legal statements about the Palestinians territorial or water rights. It all adds up to an impasse. We expect Awadallah will have the Red-Dead project high on his list of priorities for his visit later this month to Washington.  
GNEHM